

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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IOWA PHEASANT OPENER REVIEW

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Some hunters got birds. Some hunters got blown over.

Many wind-whipped pheasant hunters called it quits early on opening day, with sustained 30 mile an hour blasts common across all of Iowa. That had pheasants sitting tight, or rocketing out of shotgun range when they did flush. Sunday was a little more hospitable, with some of the hunters back out in the field.

“The groups I checked might have no birds, or maybe one on Saturday,” relays Department of Natural Resources conservation officer Erika Anderson, who patrolled Johnson County in eastern Iowa over the weekend. “Sunday, though, I don’t know where the hunters went. I did see some roosters; also a couple rabbits, even a partridge.” A similar outlook comes from neighboring Cedar and Muscatine Counties. “I talked with 30 hunters and saw (only) four dead birds,” reports officer Shawn Meier.

Those assessments seem fairly typical from officers and biologists working the opener. With an ocean of standing corn still out there and with a subdued pheasant outlook this year, hunters weren’t expecting a ‘hunt for the ages.’ In areas with decent habitat, though, those who persevered got some birds.

“Success was mixed,” agrees Rod Slings, who checked hunters in Jasper and Polk counties in central Iowa. “I talked with a group of eight hunters with 12 birds by about 11 in the morning. The wind made it difficult. Some roosters got up ahead of the group and sailed away. Others sat tight with dogs working right past them; then got up behind

everybody.” Slings points to all the corn standing (Only 62 percent was reported harvested by Monday of last week) and foresees better hunting in the weeks ahead, as that early season crop cover is transformed to stubble.

In Iowa and Keokuk counties, law enforcement supervisor Craig Jackson went against the grain somewhat, saying hunters there did surprisingly well, even with the wind. “There were fewer hunters on Sunday, but they were still getting some birds,” offers Jackson.

Slings, who heads the DNR’s recreation safety programs, was cautiously optimistic about another weekend fact. “There were no accidents reported. That’s a first since I’ve been around.” While the wind and standing corn might have reduced some activity, he assigns some of the credit to Iowa’s new ‘blaze orange’ requirement. Upland bird hunters must now wear at least one item of external clothing which is at least 50 percent blaze orange, to improve their visibility. Comments over opening weekend were all positive, from hunters in the field. “Compliance was very good,” stresses Slings. “I had one guy (whose hat was questionable). The rest of his party had a vest on him in no time.”

He says the first two weeks of the pheasant season are when most hunting incidents are investigated. “We understand the number of hunters was down slightly, but not having any accidents during the opening weekend is great news,” says Slings. Last year, the DNR investigated 15 pheasant hunting injuries. Two years ago, with the bird forecast similar to this season, there were five.

“I saw no violations of the new regulation,” notes DNR wildlife biologist Tim Thompson, checking hunters around the Hawkeye Wildlife Area near the Johnson/Iowa County line. “I did see a lot of young roosters; maybe three-fourths of them. That’s a pretty normal ratio of adults to young birds taken.” He, too, heard hunters say they were practically stepping on hunkered-down birds before they would take off in the heavy winds. “Hunters had some birds. No (three rooster) limits, but they had some,” says Thompson.

New Regulation Clarified:

Upland game *bird* hunters need to be decked out in some blaze orange this season. Those pursuing cottontail and jackrabbits need not.

New legislation requires upland bird (pheasant, quail, partridge, ruffed grouse and woodcock) hunters to wear at least one article of external clothing (cap, vest, jacket, etc) that is at least 50 percent blaze orange. An earlier news release referred to upland *game*, including cottontail and jackrabbits. While many rabbit-only hunters do wear orange--and while it is a great safety tool for the hunt--it is *not* required.

Deer Rut Peaks, Motorists On Guard

It's getting dark earlier, the crops are coming out....and Iowa whitetails are in the peak of their annual breeding period. Those three factors add up to more deer on the move. Drivers are warned to keep their eyes on the road...and on the road shoulders.

During the first two weeks of November, bucks pursue does, even those not quite ready to breed. That day-and-night pursuit pushes deer into the open, often heading across roadways they might otherwise avoid. Antlered bucks, rarely seen through most of the year, are more frequently seen dead on the roadside, having wandered into a car's path.

Motorists are advised to reduce their speeds in areas of known deer traffic; especially in the hours around sunset and sunrise; peak deer-movement periods. Another advisory is for drivers to avoid leaving the road or going into the oncoming traffic lane to avoid striking a deer. The potential for damage or injury is greater if that occurs.

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PRIVATE LANDS TREES AND SHRUBS VITAL FOR STATE WILDLIFE HABITAT

Planting native trees and shrubs or maintaining forested portions on Iowa's private lands are key ingredients for successful and healthy wildlife populations.

"This can range from songbird habitat in your backyard to woodland management in the back 40 acres," said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau. "Over 300 species of wildlife have a link to Iowa's forests, with over 90 percent of Iowa's forests in private ownership – making private lands key to wildlife habitat in Iowa.

"To maximize wildlife benefits on your land – no matter what size – foresters and wildlife biologists suggest varying plant cover to create multi layer habitat. We encourage native trees and shrubs with high wildlife values especially seed, berry and fruit producing plants. Conifers or evergreens provide an important source of winter cover for wildlife, and establish living fence rows of trees, shrubs or vines to provide food, cover and travel lanes for wildlife," Walkowiak said.

The State Forest Nursery, in Ames, provides specialty wildlife packets of native tree and shrub seedlings for private land plantings. A group of DNR wildlife biologists, and Pheasants Forever and National Wild Turkey Federation staff helped the forestry bureau design four wildlife packets of 200 native tree and shrub seedlings to cover one-quarter acre to one acre of land. These packets have been designed to meet the basic requirements of Iowa wildlife: a general Wildlife Packet; Pheasant Packet; Quail Packet; and a Wild Turkey Packet are available this spring for \$90. With the support of Iowa

Audubon, a Songbird packet of 20 trees and shrubs was designed to work for that backyard habitat and is available this spring for \$20.

For more information about wildlife habitat enhancement or for other sources of plant materials contact your local DNR forester, wildlife biologist or go to www.iowadnr.com/forestry/.

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NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION TO CONSIDER HELP FOR LEWIS AND CLARK CENTER WEDNESDAY

DES MOINES - The Natural Resource Commission (NRC) of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will meet at 8:30 a.m., Wednesday, Nov. 10, in the fourth floor conference room, Wallace State Office Bldg., in Des Moines. The meeting is open to the public.

An additional item will be up for consideration from the previously released agenda. Commissions will consider an emergency contribution to Monona County for the Lewis and Clark Visitor Center.

Commissioners will tour Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park following the meeting.

Members of the NRC are Joan Schneider, Randy Duncan, Paul Christiansen, Carol Kramer, William Sullivan, Richard Francisco and Janice Marcantonio. The DNR Director is Jeffrey Vonk.

The following is the agenda for the November meeting.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of October Meeting
- Director's Remarks
- Iowa City Deer Management Plan
- **Emergency Contribution to Monona County for Lewis & Clark Visitor Center**
- Conservation and Recreation Donations
- Concession Contract – Springbrook State Park
- Forest Legacy Conservation Easement - Kluesner
- Forest Legacy Conservation Easement – Van Gundy
- Final Rule – Chapter 64, Metal Detector Use in State Areas
- Final Rule – Chapter 61, State Parks and Recreation Areas
- Final Rule – Chapter 27, Lands and Waters Conservation Fund Program
- Final Rule – Chapter 51, Game Management Areas
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 52, Wildlife Refuges

- Cooperative Research on the Missouri River
- Final Rule – Chapter 79, Fish Stocking Procedures for Private Waters
- Final Rule – Chapter 81, Sport Fishing Rule
- Final Rule – Chapter 90, Aquatic Invasive Species
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 94, Nonresident Deer Hunting
- Final Rule – Chapter 98, Wild Turkey Spring Hunting (Tabled)
- Appeal of Proposed Decision – David J. Vroman
- Construction Projects
- Land Acquisition
 - Muskrat Slough Wildlife Management Area, Jones County – McQuillen
 - Lacey-Keosauqua State Park, Van Buren County – Interagency Transfer of Jurisdiction
 - Lewis and Clark State Park, Monona County – Prichard Land Exchange
- Boone Water Works 28E Agreement
- Pleasant Hill-Des Moines River Access 28E Agreement
- Chapter 18 Lease – East Okoboji Lake
- Chapter 18 Lease – Fogle Lake, Ringgold County (Tabled)
- Meeting Dates and Locations for 2005
- General Discussion
- Items for Next Meeting, Dec. 9, in Des Moines

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